

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED AND CONVICTED ACTIVISTS MUST BE RELEASED

On 17 August, activists Rokiadou Doumbia and Mohamed Youssouf Bathily were convicted to ten years imprisonment, three of which were suspended for “criminal conspiracy” and “discrediting the state”. Their cases are emblematic of the increasing repression of dissenting voices in Mali and constitute violations of their right to freedom of expression. They must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister of Justice and Human rights

Mr Mamoudou Kassogue

Cite administrative – bâtiment 12, BP 97 Bamako, Mali

Email: mkassogue@justice.gouv.ml

Dear Minister,

I am concerned about the arbitrary detention and unlawful conviction of activists **Rokiadou Doumbia** (known as “Rose poivron”) and Mohamed Youssouf Bathily (known as **Ras Bath**).

Rokiadou Doumbia is an activist and social media influencer who through TikTok created a space where her 175,000 followers could speak openly about daily hardships and rising food prices, earning her the nickname “Rose Poivron” (“Bell Pepper Rose”). On 13 March 2023, she was arrested by the police in Bamako, Mali’s capital, following her denunciation, in a video posted on her TikTok page, of the high cost of living, while also describing the political transition as a “failure.” Ras Bath was arrested on the same day (13 March 2023) after claiming during a meeting that former Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, who died while in detention in 2022, had been the victim of an assassination. Ras Bath is a radio host and commentator. He is an activist, and openly broadcasted about Mali’s economic hardships, inflation, and shrinking civic spaces.

On 2 August 2023, Rokiadou Doumbia was sentenced to one year imprisonment and a fine of one million francs CFA (approximately 1,700 USD) for “incitement to revolt and disturbing public order through the use of information and communication technologies.”. In July 2024, she was acquitted by the Court of Appeal. However, she remained in prison at the request of the prosecutor for the ongoing “criminal conspiracy” and “discrediting the state” charges which had not yet been tried. Ras Bath was tried on July 2023, for “simulating a crime”. He too was subsequently acquitted, but following an appeal by the prosecution, he was sentenced in March 2024 to 18 months in prison, nine of which were suspended. Although he should have been released after the verdict, he also remained in arbitrary detention for charges of “criminal conspiracy” and “discrediting the state”.

On 10 August, during their trial, prosecutors alleged the broadcaster and influencer were “in association” with each other, with Ras Bath having invited Rokiadou Doumbia onto his show on two previous occasions. On 17 August, Rokiadou Doumbia and Ras Bath were convicted by Bamako Court of Appeal’s criminal chamber to ten years in jail, three of which were suspended for “criminal conspiracy” and “discrediting the state”. Their conviction and sentencing are in connection to their activism and criticism of the authorities, in violation of their rights to freedom of expression. Arrest or detention as punishment for the peaceful exercise of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, is arbitrary and violates the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Mali is a state party to.

I call upon you to take all necessary steps within your authority to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Rokiadou Doumbia and Ras Bath. I also urge you to bring Mali’s practices into line with its regional and international human rights obligations regarding freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over the past years, the shrinking of civic space in Mali has been characterized by violations of freedom of expression, including press freedom and the right to information, as well as freedom of association. Mali has been governed since 2021 by military officers who took control from the democratically elected government of President Keita in 2020 following protests and then removed the civilian transitional authorities from power in May 2021, following disagreements.

Opposition leaders, activists and human rights defenders who publicly expressed their disagreement with the decisions taken by the transitional authorities have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, and prosecuted since 2022.

This is not the first time Ras Bath has been targeted by the authorities. He was first arrested in August 2016 for allegedly "inciting troops to disobey". He was released two days later. A year later, in July 2017, while abroad, he was sentenced in his absence to twelve months in prison without serving any time. In December 2020, he was arrested again in a case involving an alleged plot against the transitional government. The proceedings were dismissed for lack of evidence, and he was released in April 2021.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 March 2027

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Rokiatou Doumbia (She/her), Ras Bath (He/him)